

We Are Grateful

Otsaliheliga • ᄒᄒᄒᄒᄒᄒ



TRACI SORELL Illustrated by **FRANÉ LESSAC**

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TRACI SORELL

Illustrated by FRANÉ LESSAC

 Charlesbridge



For my family, fellow Cherokee citizens, and children
everywhere.—T. S.
For Traci, Wado for sharing your story.—F. L.

Wado to: Emilee Chavez, the young Cherokee beta reader of every version of my story;
Ryan Mackey of the Cherokee Nation Community and Cultural Outreach Program; Will
Chavez of the Cherokee Phoenix; the Cherokee Heritage Center staff, especially Collie
Chunestudy & Brandi Rose; and Jeff Edwards & Durbin Feeling of the Cherokee Nation's
Cherokee Language Program for their assistance with this book. Mr. Feeling,
Cherokee language translator, approved the transliterations, pronunciation guides,
and syllabary for the Cherokee words used here.

I also offer immense gratitude to Frané Lessac, who visited the Cherokee Nation—
experiencing its people, culture, history, flora and fauna—
to bring its vibrant modern existence into this book.—T. S.

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Published by Cherokee Nation Publishing, Inc., 141 Main Street, Westport, NH 03090
802.938.0222 • www.cherokeebooks.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Wado, Traci, author. | Lessac, Frané, illustrator.
Title: We are grateful. / Traci Wado.
Illustrated by Frané Lessac.
Other titles: Otsaliheliga.
Description: Westport, NH : Cherokee Nation Publishing, 2018.

Illustrations: 100 cm. 100 p. (hardcover) 100 p. (paperback) 100 p. (hardcover) 100 p. (paperback) 100 p. (hardcover) 100 p. (paperback)
ISBN 9781603440000 (hardcover) ISBN 9781603440017 (paperback) ISBN 9781603440024 (hardcover) ISBN 9781603440031 (paperback)
Subjects: 1. Otsaliheliga. 2. Cherokee language. 3. Cherokee Nation. 4. Cherokee people. 5. Cherokee culture. 6. Cherokee history. 7. Cherokee art. 8. Cherokee literature. 9. Cherokee music. 10. Cherokee religion. 11. Cherokee social life. 12. Cherokee customs. 13. Cherokee traditions. 14. Cherokee values. 15. Cherokee beliefs. 16. Cherokee spirituality. 17. Cherokee identity. 18. Cherokee pride. 19. Cherokee heritage. 20. Cherokee legacy. 21. Cherokee future. 22. Cherokee hope. 23. Cherokee love. 24. Cherokee joy. 25. Cherokee gratitude. 26. Cherokee thankfulness. 27. Cherokee appreciation. 28. Cherokee respect. 29. Cherokee honor. 30. Cherokee dignity. 31. Cherokee strength. 32. Cherokee resilience. 33. Cherokee courage. 34. Cherokee faith. 35. Cherokee faithfulness. 36. Cherokee loyalty. 37. Cherokee integrity. 38. Cherokee honesty. 39. Cherokee kindness. 40. Cherokee compassion. 41. Cherokee empathy. 42. Cherokee understanding. 43. Cherokee wisdom. 44. Cherokee knowledge. 45. Cherokee experience. 46. Cherokee memory. 47. Cherokee imagination. 48. Cherokee creativity. 49. Cherokee innovation. 50. Cherokee progress. 51. Cherokee achievement. 52. Cherokee success. 53. Cherokee happiness. 54. Cherokee well-being. 55. Cherokee health. 56. Cherokee wealth. 57. Cherokee power. 58. Cherokee influence. 59. Cherokee reputation. 60. Cherokee status. 61. Cherokee position. 62. Cherokee position. 63. Cherokee position. 64. Cherokee position. 65. Cherokee position. 66. Cherokee position. 67. Cherokee position. 68. Cherokee position. 69. Cherokee position. 70. Cherokee position. 71. Cherokee position. 72. Cherokee position. 73. Cherokee position. 74. Cherokee position. 75. Cherokee position. 76. Cherokee position. 77. Cherokee position. 78. Cherokee position. 79. Cherokee position. 80. Cherokee position. 81. Cherokee position. 82. Cherokee position. 83. Cherokee position. 84. Cherokee position. 85. Cherokee position. 86. Cherokee position. 87. Cherokee position. 88. Cherokee position. 89. Cherokee position. 90. Cherokee position. 91. Cherokee position. 92. Cherokee position. 93. Cherokee position. 94. Cherokee position. 95. Cherokee position. 96. Cherokee position. 97. Cherokee position. 98. Cherokee position. 99. Cherokee position. 100. Cherokee position.

Printed in China
802.938.0222

The illustrations for this book were created with gratitude on Cherokee paper.
Display type: hand lettered by Ryan O'Shanks.
Text type: 100% Cotton Book.
Color reproduction by Cherokee Nation Publishing, Inc., Singapore.
Printed and Published by Cherokee Nation Publishing, Inc., Singapore.
Production supervision by Brian S. Walker.
Designed by Ryan O'Shanks.



Cherokee people say *otsaliheliga* to express
gratitude. It is a reminder to celebrate our blessings
and reflect on struggles—daily, throughout the year,
and across the seasons.

otsaliheliga • oh-jah-LEE-hay-lee-gah • ᎠᏍᏚᏰᏩᎠ • we are grateful

ULIGOHVSDI • FALL

When cool breezes blow and leaves fall,
we say otsaliheliga . . .



uligohvsi • oo-lee-GO-hubs-dee • OPAあひ • fall/autumn

... as shell shakers dance all night around the fire,
and burnt cedar's scent drifts upward during the
Great New Moon Ceremony.



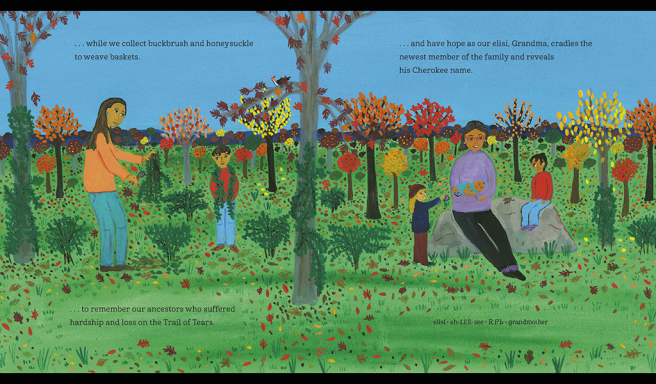
... as we clean our houses, wear new clothes,
enjoy a feast, and forget old quarrels to welcome
the Cherokee New Year.

... while we collect buckbrush and honeysuckle
to weave baskets.

... and have hope as our elisi, Grandma, cradles the
newest member of the family and reveals
his Cherokee name.

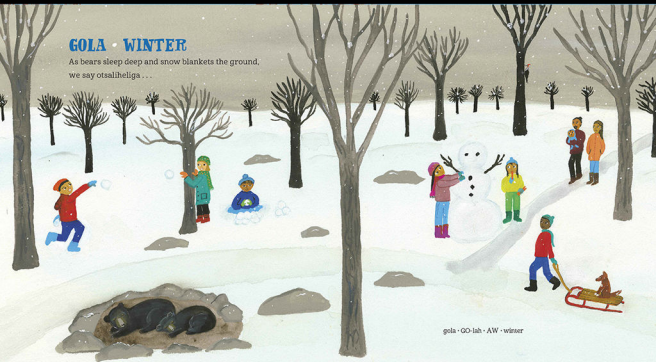
... to remember our ancestors who suffered
hardship and loss on the Trail of Tears.

elisi - eh-LEE see - R.Pb - grandmother



GOLA • WINTER

As bears sleep deep and snow blankets the ground,
we say otsaliheliga . . .

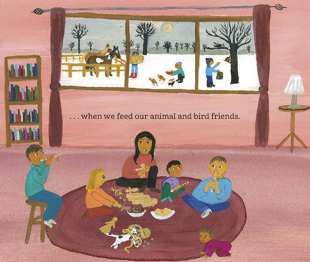


gola • GO-lah • AW • winter

... while elders share stories and we savor buttery
bean bread and steamy hominy soup.



... when we feed our animal and bird friends.



... as older children teach the younger ones how
to make corn-husk dolls and play cane flutes.

... while we gather to remember an uncle who has passed on.



... as men cuddle babies and sing traditional lullabies in Tsalagi, Cherokee.



Tsalagi • JAH-lah-geeh • CWJ • Cherokee

GOGEYI • SPRING

When showers fill streams and shoots spring up,
we say otsaliheliga . . .



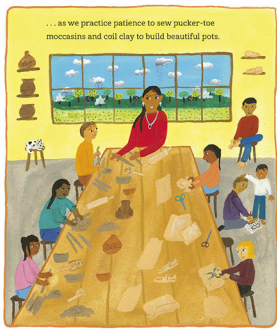
gogeysi • go-GEH-yee • Ah-Ah • spring

... while men sing, asking for thunder and lightning's
protection of the emerging sprouts that women tend.

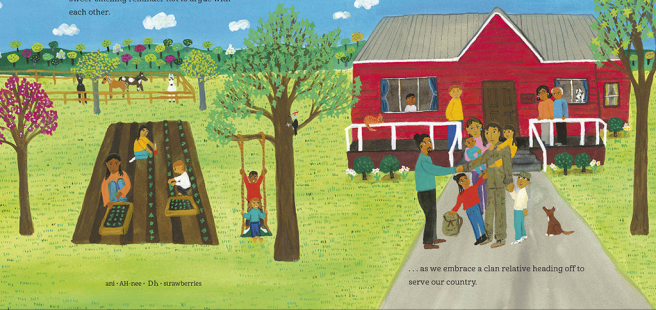


... as we gather wild onions, spring's first food,
and serve them with hen's eggs.

... as we practice patience to sew pucker-toe
moccasins and coil clay to build beautiful pots.



... as we plant ani, strawberries, an ancestral story's
sweet-smelling reminder not to argue with
each other.

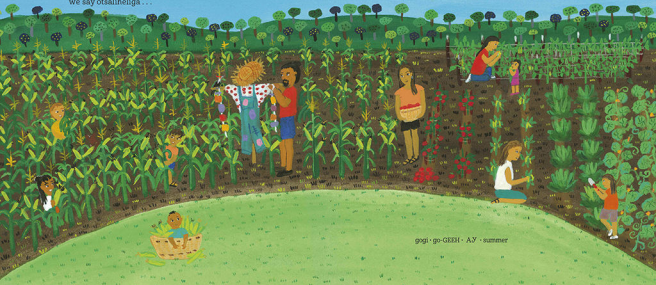


ani • AH-nee • Dh • strawberries

... as we embrace a clan relative heading off to
serve our country.

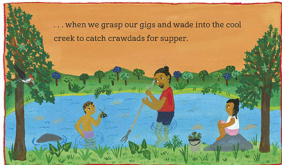
GOGI • SUMMER

As the crops mature and the sun scorches,
we say otsaliheliga . . .



gogi • go-GEEH • AY • summer

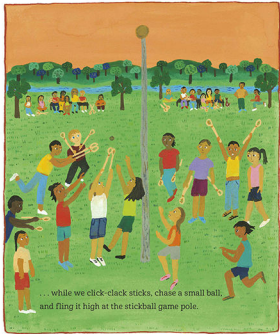
... when we grasp our gigs and wade into the cool creek to catch crawdads for supper.



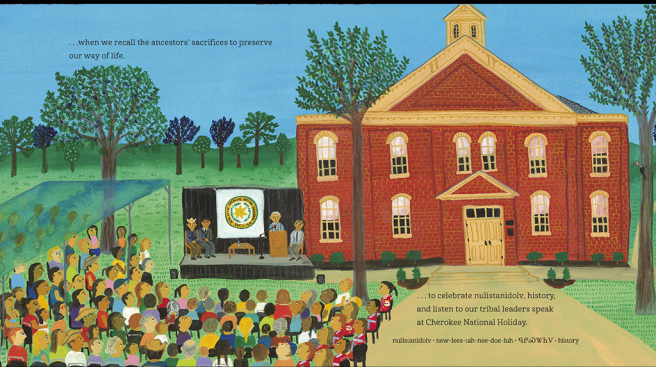
... as we sink our teeth into the season's first harvest at the Green Corn Ceremony.



... while we click-clack sticks, chase a small ball, and fling it high at the stickball game pole.



...when we recall the ancestors' sacrifices to preserve
our way of life.



... to celebrate *nulistanidolv*, history,
and listen to our tribal leaders speak
at Cherokee National Holiday.

nulistanidolv • *new-lee-uh-nee-doe-luh* • ᏈᏆᏗᏍᏔᏅᏍᏔᏅᏍᏔᏅᏍᏔᏅ • history



Every day, every season.

Otsaliheliga. We are grateful.

DEFINITIONS

Shell shakers: *Stomp dances around a sacred fire occur as part of the ceremonial life of the Cherokee. Women are the “shell shakers,” wearing traditional leg rattles made out of box turtle shells filled with pebbles on their calves. Women shuffle their feet in a rhythmic pattern to “shake the shells,” and the men sing in Cherokee. The first man calls out for others to join him. A woman follows him, and a man-woman pattern forms. Stomp dances start after sunset and often last all night.*

Fall celebrations: The Cherokee New Year begins in the fall. Some families and communities observe the Great New Moon Ceremony while others combine it with their celebration of the annual Fall Meeting, what was once the Ripe Corn Festival. People fast, teach, share a community meal, and then stomp dance.

Trail of Tears: Although the Cherokee people come from the southeastern United States and many continue to live there, the majority now live in Oklahoma, Indian removed by the US government, or the Trail of Tears, as it is known among the Cherokee, split the seven tribal clans and families between present-day North Carolina and Oklahoma in the 1830s. Traditional Cherokee way of life focuses on a mother-centered culture, from governance to familial relations. Cherokee children belong to their mother's clan, making maternal relatives key to their upbringing. Many of these lifeways were disrupted and many people died because of the removal.

Strawberries: There is a Cherokee ancestral story called “First Strawberries” about the man introducing strawberries to reunite the first man and first woman.

Gigging: Cherokee people traditionally catch crawdads using a long piece of river cane attached to a pointed metal spear, called a pig. Some are made with a wire clothes hanger, a wooden broom handle, and string tape or twine. Cherokee people fry crawdads to eat.

Green Corn Ceremony: An important tribal ceremony featuring all night stomp dances and fasting prior to consuming the season's first corn harvest, along with other traditional foods.

Stickball: A game similar to lacrosse but traditionally played by men to settle disputes and prevent war. Today stickball is played before tribal ceremonies and for sport and fun in intertribal tournaments. Boys and men use two sticks to play and girls and women use their hands.

Cherokee National Holiday: An annual commemoration of the 1829 signing of the Cherokee Constitution. More than 40,000 people from all over the world participate in this Labor Day weekend festival held in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the capital of the Cherokee Nation. It features a parade, traditional games, a State of the Nation address by the principal chief, live music, Cherokee food and artwork, and an intertribal powwow. The holiday occurs around the same time as the traditional Ripe Corn Festival, which celebrates the fall harvest.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Cherokee culture places a strong emphasis on expressing gratitude to unrelated-to-be-NEE-lah-see-bee (jo-NEE-ah), literally “the one who provides all,” or God. We also show gratitude for one another, animals, birds, plants, fish, the cosmos, water, and land. Cherokee people believe that recognizing and honoring the ways that the sacred and the duties of daily life are intertwined requires effort, ritual, and awareness, but above all, gratitude. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide a contemporary view of Cherokee culture in this book. From my childhood until today, there have been few books that show present-day Cherokee children and their families. Most have focused on our traditional stories or historical figures and events. Other books have misrepresented our matrilineal (mother-centered) culture or perpetuated stereotypes, such as the existence of “Cherokee princesses,” even though royalty is a foreign concept for Cherokee people.

Many of us still observe the ancestral and ceremonial ways of life. We also live and work in the modern non-Cherokee world. Cherokee people are citizens of our tribal nation and of the United States. There are many distinct laws and responsibilities applied to us because of that dual status. We work to maintain a balance between these two worlds.

Good things for all who come before us, show here now, and show yet to come.

A note about the sources for this book: In addition to my family's lived experience as Cherokee Nation citizens, I talked with traditional Cherokee artists, storytellers, cultural bearers, and language speakers to inform my work. A variety of media and print resources are available in a classroom guide that can be found both on CharlotteBridge's website and at www.unclonell.com.

THE CHEROKEE SYLLABARY

Cherokee people hold Sequoyah, a Cherokee blacksmith and silversmith, in high esteem for his development of the Cherokee written language. In the early 1820s, Sequoyah alone invented the Cherokee syllabary for the language. In an alphabet each letter has a sound, and in a syllabary each symbol stands for a whole syllable. The tribal newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, was founded in 1828, and books have been published in Cherokee, including the Bible, schoolbooks, hymnals, and children's stories. Sequoyah's syllabary is still taught. Cherokee people use the language for internet searches and word processing as well as social media, texting, and email.

For more information about contemporary Cherokee culture and history visit the Cherokee Nation at www.cherokee.org. Turn the page to see the full Cherokee syllabary.

CHEROKEE SYLLABARY

D _a	R _e	T _i	Ꭰ _o	Ꭱ _u	i _v
S _{ga} Ꭲ _{ka}	Ꭶ _{ge}	Ꭳ _{gi}	A _{go}	J _{ga}	E _{gv}
Ꭵ _{ha}	P _{he}	Ꭰ _{hi}	Ꭶ _{ho}	Ꭶ _{hu}	Ꭰ _{hv}
W _{la}	Ꭶ _{le}	Ꭶ _{li}	G _{lo}	M _{lu}	Ꭰ _{lv}
Ꭶ _{ma}	Ꭰ _{me}	H _{mi}	Ꭰ _{mo}	Ꭳ _{mu}	G _{mv}
Ꭰ _{na} Ꭶ _{na} G _{na}	Ꭰ _{ne}	Ꭶ _{ni}	Z _{no}	Ꭰ _{nu}	Ꭱ _{nv}
I _{qua}	Ꭰ _{que}	Ꭶ _{qi}	Ꭳ _{qo}	Ꭰ _{qu}	E _{qv}
Ꭰ _{sa} Ꭰ _{sa}	Ꭶ _{se}	Ꭶ _{si}	Ꭶ _{so}	Ꭶ _{su}	R _{sv}
Ꭶ _{da} W _{da}	S _{de} Ꭶ _{de}	Ꭰ _{di} Ꭰ _{di}	V _{do}	S _{du}	Ꭶ _{dv}
Ꭰ _{di} Ꭰ _{di}	L _{de}	C _{de}	Ꭶ _{do}	Ꭶ _{du}	P _{dv}
G _{da}	V _{de}	H _{di}	K _{do}	J _{du}	C _{dv}
G _{va}	Ꭰ _{ve}	Ꭰ _{vi}	Ꭰ _{vo}	Ꭰ _{vu}	Ꭰ _{vv}
Ꭰ _{ya}	B _{ye}	Ꭰ _{yi}	Ꭶ _{yo}	G _{yu}	B _{yv}

SOUNDS REPRESENTED BY VOWELS

a, as a in father, or short as a in rival

e, as a in plate, or short as e in met

i, as i in pique, or short as i in pit

o, as o in note, approaching aw in law

u, as oo in fool, or short as u in pull

v, as u in but, nasalized

CONSONANT SOUNDS

'g' is nearly as in English, but approaching 'k'. 'd' nearly as in English, but approaching to t.

'h,' 'k,' 'l,' 'm,' 'n,' 'q,' 's,' 't,' 'w,' and 'y' as in English. Syllables beginning with 'g' except

'ga' have sometimes the power of 'k.' 'go,' 'du,' and 'dv' are sometimes sounded 'to,' 'tu,' and

'tv,' and syllables written with 'tl' except 'tla' sometimes vary to 'dl.'

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